

Soviets want peaceful solution with Lithuania

WASHINGTON — A U.S. expert said recently that Moscow's actions with regard to Lithuania's declaration of independence would be a litmus test for *perestroika*. I agree.

After the Vilnius decision, an extraordinary session of the USSR Congress of People's Deputies reaffirmed the right of every constituent republic to secede, but qualified the Lithuanian action as illegal. There are valid reasons for that.

Each republic's right to self-determination is recorded in the Soviet Constitution, and the Soviet legislature is drafting a special act on the mechanism for exercising this right. The Lithuanian problems should be solved by political means in conformity with this law.

Whether or not Lithuania decides to stay with the USSR, say the deputies, it has for 50 years shared one economy with the other republics; it takes time to solve a multitude of legal, economic, territorial, trade, customs and other issues.

In a statement, the Soviet government stressed that all installations and projects in Lithuania which are under the jurisdiction of the central government are the property of the USSR; their status cannot be changed by unilateral republican decisions. The statement stressed the need to ensure security of nuclear power plants and uninterrupted operation of federal transport lines.

After this, Mikhail Gorbachev signed a decree on additional measures to safeguard all Soviet citizens' rights and protect the USSR's sovereignty on Lithuanian territory.

The paratroopers dispatched to Vilnius are to guard key state installations and do not mean Moscow is preparing any forcible reply to the challenge of Lithuanian separatists.

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Gorbachev, in conversation with Sen. Edward Kennedy, confirmed that he was against using force in Lithuania, unless human lives were threatened.

"I am almost certain that the Soviet president's decree on the surrender of weapons was meant precisely to avert bloodshed, so that arms would not get into wrong hands," Lithuania's interior minister said.

Many in Lithuania do not support the separatists. A well-attended rally in Vilnius March 18 expressed full support for the Congress of People's Deputies' declaring the secession move to be illegal. "A mechanism should be created," the demonstrators declared, "to ensure the full satisfaction of the interests of even the least numerous people, of each ethnic group, of each individual."

Juozas Urbys, Lithuania's foreign minister from 1938 to 1940, wrote a letter read to the Sajudis Sejm: "It will be important for us to maintain good relations with Russia, and with the Russian people. For a long time our economic ties will be based on trade with the Soviet Union. It is nonsense to think that we can turn to the West and instantly get all kinds of benefits from it. The West never gives anything for free."

The real picture of public opinion in Lithuania might be best expressed in a referendum, in which all the people of the republic will have a chance to decide their future.

Moscow is prepared to solve any problems that emerge peacefully, without overheating the situation unnecessarily. Why not look for any available opportunity to conduct a constructive political dialogue?